

Make 'em smile . . . make 'em laugh

Georgia Smith, Apparel Manager at K mart 7423, Logan, Utah has two professions — that of managing the apparel area at 7423 and clowning around. That's right, clowning around, seriously, of course.

"Clowning is one of the oldest acting professions in the world," states Georgia. "I love children and this gives me the opportunity to make a child, be they rich or poor, smile." Piffle, the clown's name, is a late 19th century woman complete with pantaloons, bustle and high button shoes converted from a pair of army boots.

"My costume depicts the era of my theme," explains Georgia, a period of time in which she would have like to live. "Piffle also gives me an opportunity to express to people the day and time I wanted to live in . . ."

As an apparel manager, Georgia comes well equipped. She has degrees in textile arts from Utah State University and fashion merchandising from Tobe-Coburn in New York. As a clown she has four years of experience behind her, professionally, and finds that clowning brings rewards that are irresistibly fulfilling. "I can say things through clowning that I can't say any other way," says Georgia. "You really know that people love — that there's a beautiful world out there. There is nothing so great as the unconditional love of a little child who throws her arms around my neck, saying, 'Oh, Piffle, I love you.'"

Admitting to a lifelong interest in costuming, Georgia launched her career as a clown in a rather unlikely setting. She was serving in the Florida - Fort Lauderdale mission of the LDS church as a district leader at the time. Faced with the challenge of what to do over a three day holiday weekend, she hit upon the idea of dressing up the "whole district" as clowns to pay a visit to Cedars of Lebanon hospital in Miami.

Quite by accident, the clowns ended up on the TV news when an NBC crew, which happened to be in the hospital filming a visiting diplomat, caught their act.

Improving upon her act, Georgia enlisted the help of a few Barnum and Bailey clowns for instructions. "They instructed us quite a bit while we were in the mission field on our 'P' (preparation) days," she says.

By the time she left the mission to return to her home on July 18, 1979, Georgia had made up her mind to become a professional clown.

Now four years later, Georgia is registered with the Clowns of America, a professional



Piffle, alias Georgia Smith, apparel manager, cheers up kids at K mart 7423, Logan, Utah by making animal balloons.

clown association which maintains a registry of clowns who have complied with its guidelines. The association also sponsors an annual convention and publishes a trade magazine known as *Caliope*.

Among the requirements to gain registration with the national association is the development of a name, costume and theme. Georgia says the association recognizes three types of clowns — whitefaced, hobo and august (characterized only by painted large eyes and mouth).

Would-be clowns study make-up, costuming and even the ethics of clowning. Professional clowns learn the 17 commandments of clowning. One such rule is that the professional clown never sheds his or her role as a clown while in public. "The rules are not only designed to protect the integrity of clowns but to protect clowning as a profession," says Georgia.

How does one go about becoming a clown? There's only one true clown school says Georgia and that's the Barnum and Bailey circus. But you can learn by apprenticing yourself to an alley (local organizations within the association. The term alley refers to early circus days when the various groups in a circus parked their

traveling trailers to form alleys such as clown alley or performer's alley). Georgia belongs to Alley No. 72, in Salt Lake City, which was honored by receiving an invitation to the 4th of July Parade in Washington, D.C.

Within the association are various levels of clowning attainable by meeting specific requirements. She and Piffle have been one, so to speak, since 1979 and have attained the third level of serious clown business. "My goal is to make fifth level," says Georgia. Fifth level is to clowning as black belt is to karate.

But still at third level, Georgia is making people smile, making them laugh and who else would be the experts on making us smile but clowns. "That smile is important to me," she says. "Children will approach Piffle and say, 'I love you, Piffle' and they really do. A child will identify with one particular clown. A truly professional clown emanates love."

What does she hope her clowning will bring for her in the future? An invitation to participate in the 1983 Rose Parade in Pasadena, California.

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